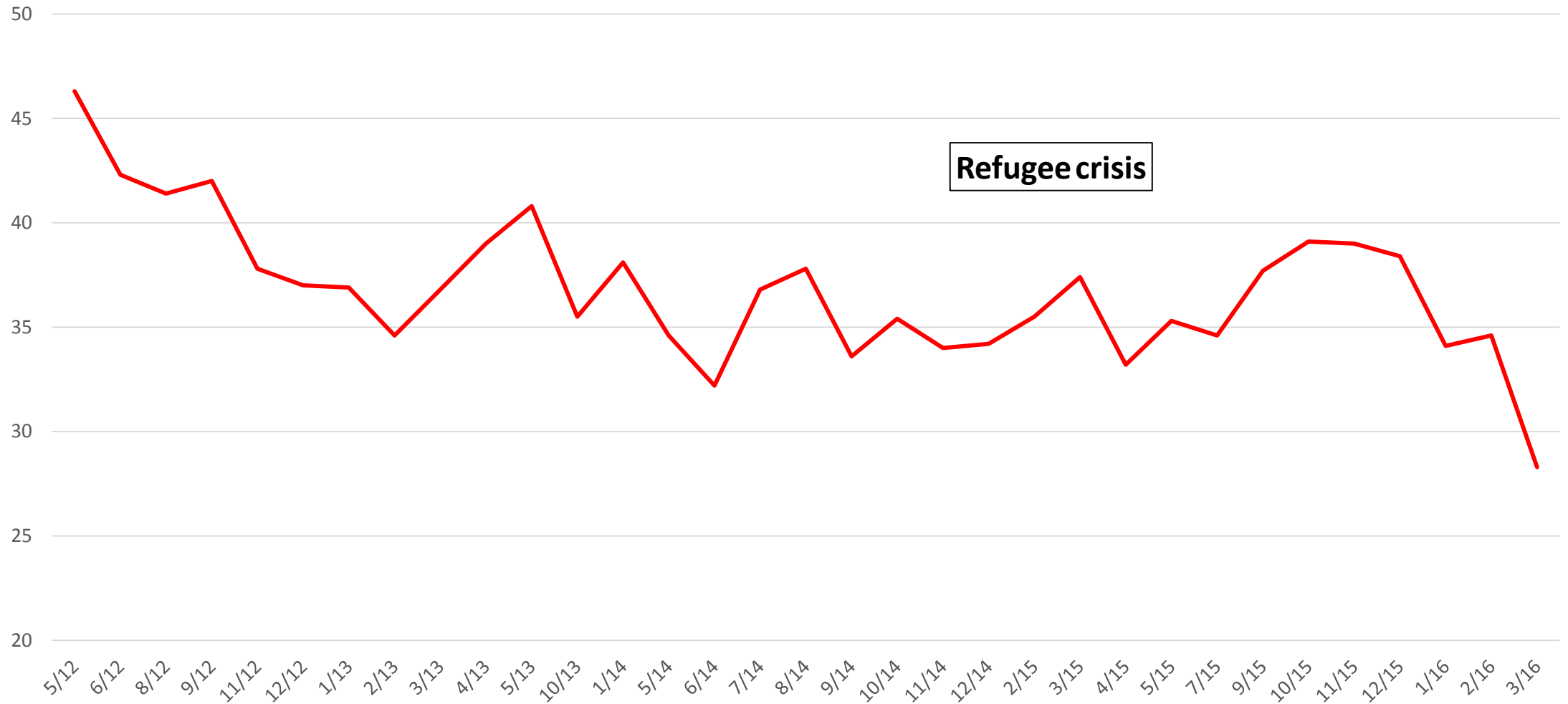


# Recent Development

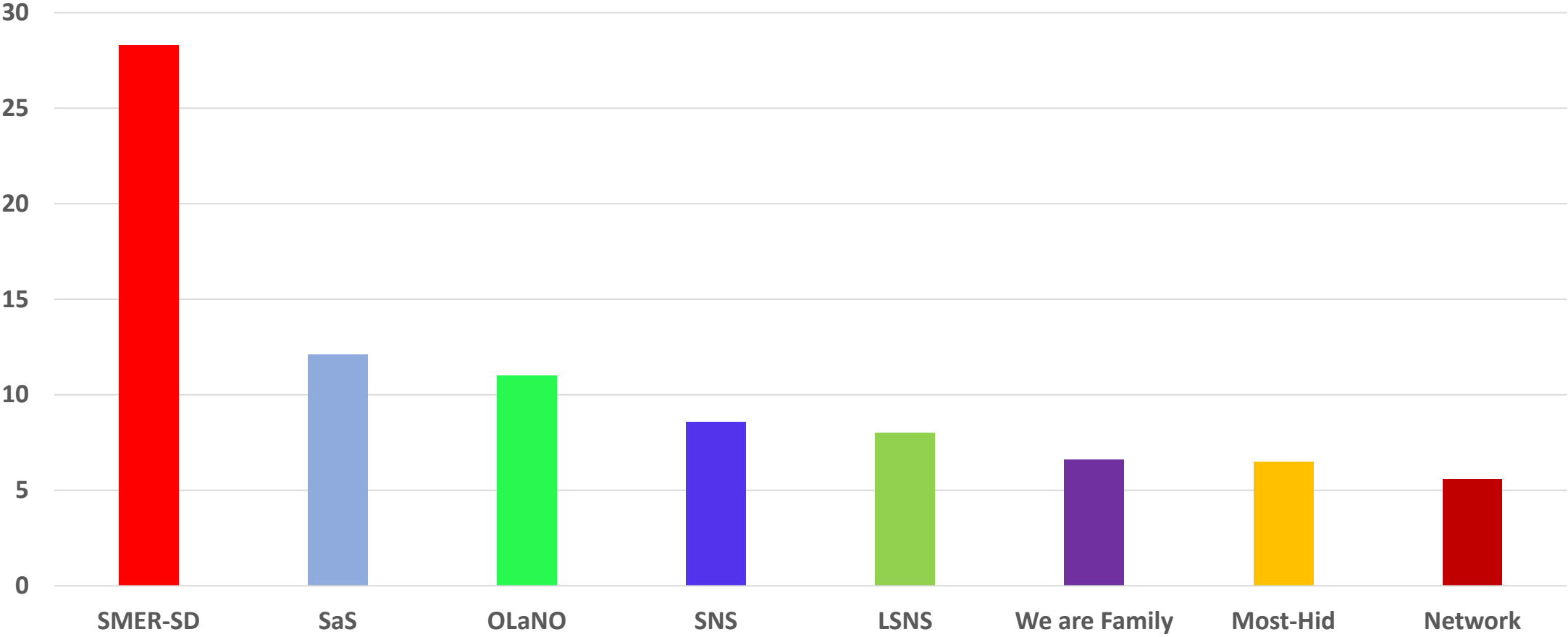
Kuciak, 2020 Election, COVID-19, Ukraine

Peter Spáč

# Support of SMER-SD (2012-2016)



# 2016 General Election



# New Government

- Decline of SMER-SD excluded the scenario of a one-party government
- Two scenarios:
  - SMER-SD + several partners
  - Grand coalition without SMER-SD
- Final outcome:
  - SMER-SD, SNS, Most-Hid, Network
  - Fico as the PM for the third time
  - Network collapsed shortly after that and part of its MPs went to Most
- *“The barrier against extremism”*

# Acceptance of the government SMER-SD, SNS, Most-Hid, Network

	Acceptable	Not acceptable	Do not know
SMER-SD	85	11	3
SNS	60	29	12
Most-Hid	39	47	13
Network	36	45	18
KDH	31	53	16
We are Family	23	62	15
LSNS	19	71	10
SaS	19	77	4
SMK	16	84	0
OLaNO	13	84	3
Non voters	30	45	25
All	39	47	14



**VIETE SI PREDSTAVIŤ  
VLÁDU BEZ SMERU?  
MY ÁNO.**



# The Breaking Point in February 2018

- Murder of investigative journalist J. Kuciak and his fiancée M. Kušnírová at their home
- Tremendous consequences:
  - Public impact comparable to November 1989
  - Mass demonstrations around the whole country
  - Shifts in public opinions
  - Personal earthquake in the government
  - Negative effect primarily on SMER-SD





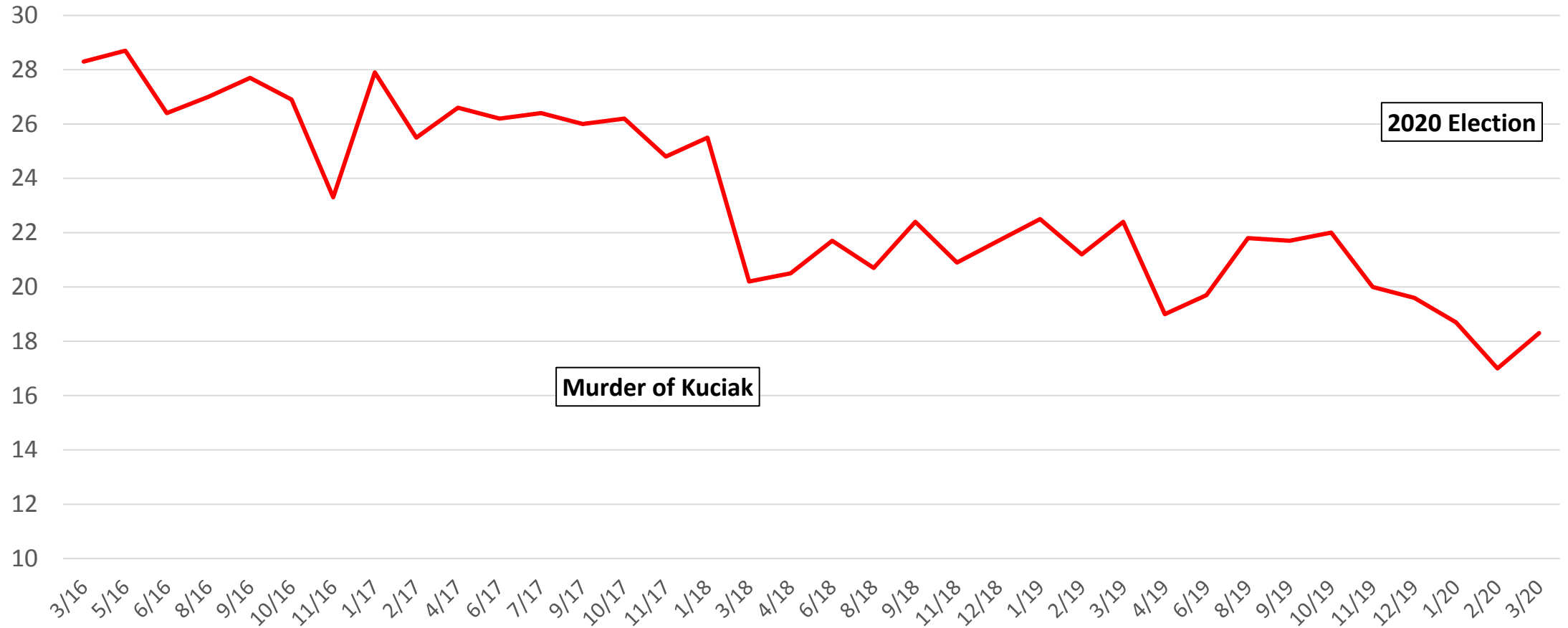


# Personal Consequences

- Various prominent officials forced to step down
  - PM Fico
  - Minister of Interior Kaliňák
  - President of the Slovak Police Force Gašpar
- Peter Pellegrini as the new PM (SMER-SD)
  - Fico remained SMER-SD leader
- The General Attorney promised to unleash “hell”



# Support of SMER-SD



# Investigation (1)

- The Italian scenario



# Investigation (2)

- The Kočner network scenario
- Murder as revenge
- Network of judges granting him protection
- Threema



# New parties in the opposition

- Progressive Slovakia (centre-left and liberal)
- Together – Civic Democracy (centre-right)
  
- Successful cooperation in 2018 local and 2019 EP and presidential election
  
- For the People:
  - Established by Andrej Kiska after finishing his mandate
  - More conservative leaning



# Four Months Before Election

Party	Votes in %	Votes - Threshold	Projected Seats
SMER-SD	20.0	15.0	36
PS – Together	11.7	4.7	21
For the People	10.6	5.6	19
LSNS	10.3	5.3	19
We are Family	7.0	2.0	13
SNS	6.8	1.8	13
KDH	5.7	0.7	10
OLaNO	5.7	0.7	10
SaS	5.0	0.0	9
Most-Hid	4.1	-0.9	0

Survey by Focus Agency, October 30 – November 6, N = 1,020

# Integration Attempts

- “Democratic” opposition:
  - PS-Together, For the People, OLaNO, SaS, KDH
  - Separate line of KDH
  - For the People only accepted a cooperation of all parties or nothing
    - as a result, all parties continued alone (and PS-Together as a coalition)
- *„If there are too many parties just above the threshold, it is naive to expect that voters will coordinate their behavior to save all of them”*

Peter Spáč, 11.11.2019

(<https://dennikn.sk/1647669/volby-2020-nerozhodnu-vitazi-ale-porazeni/>)



# Further Integration Attempts

- Hungarian parties:
  - Both Most-Hid and SMK (now as MKO-MKS) below the threshold
  - Too many Hungarian parties for a single Hungarian minority
  - Initial hope to cooperate ended without any result
- Far right and protest parties:
  - LSNS and the newly emerged Homeland
  - Kotleba and Harabin scored 530,000 votes in 2019 presidential election (roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of all votes)
  - Discussions on integration failed

# Main Topics in the Campaign

- The 2018 murder
  - Second anniversary only a few days before the election
- Corruption, scandals of SMER-SD, linkages to Kočner
- Rise of LSNS and extremism in general
- Unsuccessful attempt to bring back “old” topics, e.g. immigrants



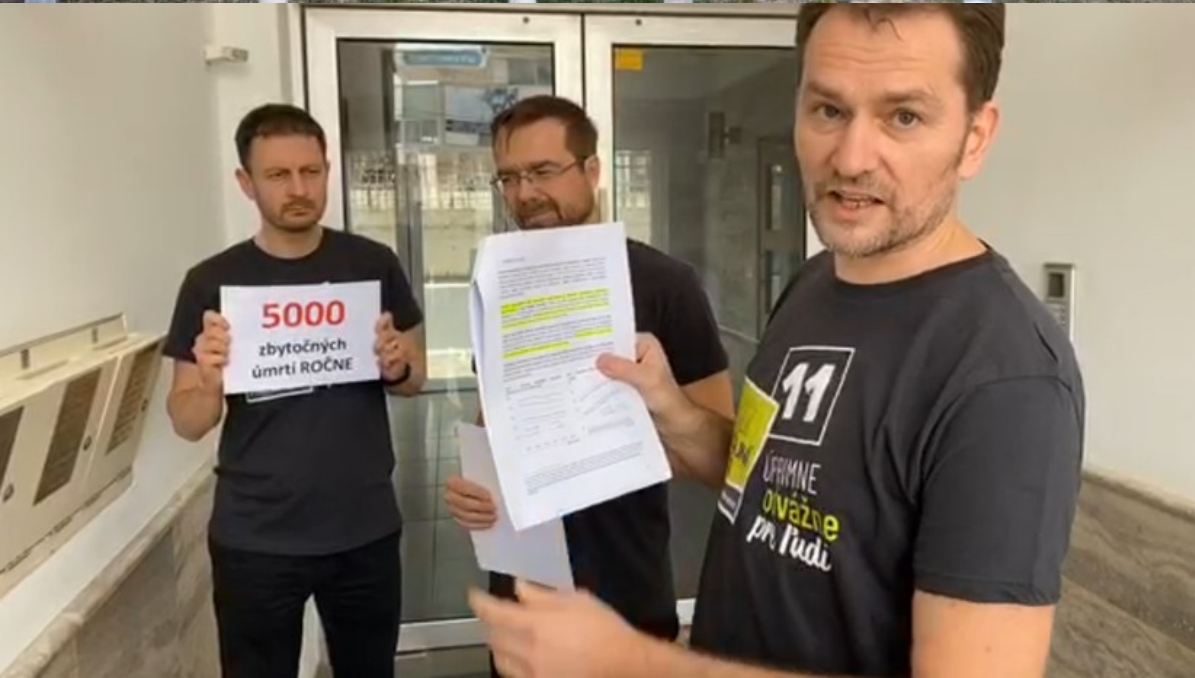
#PELLEGRINI

2020 

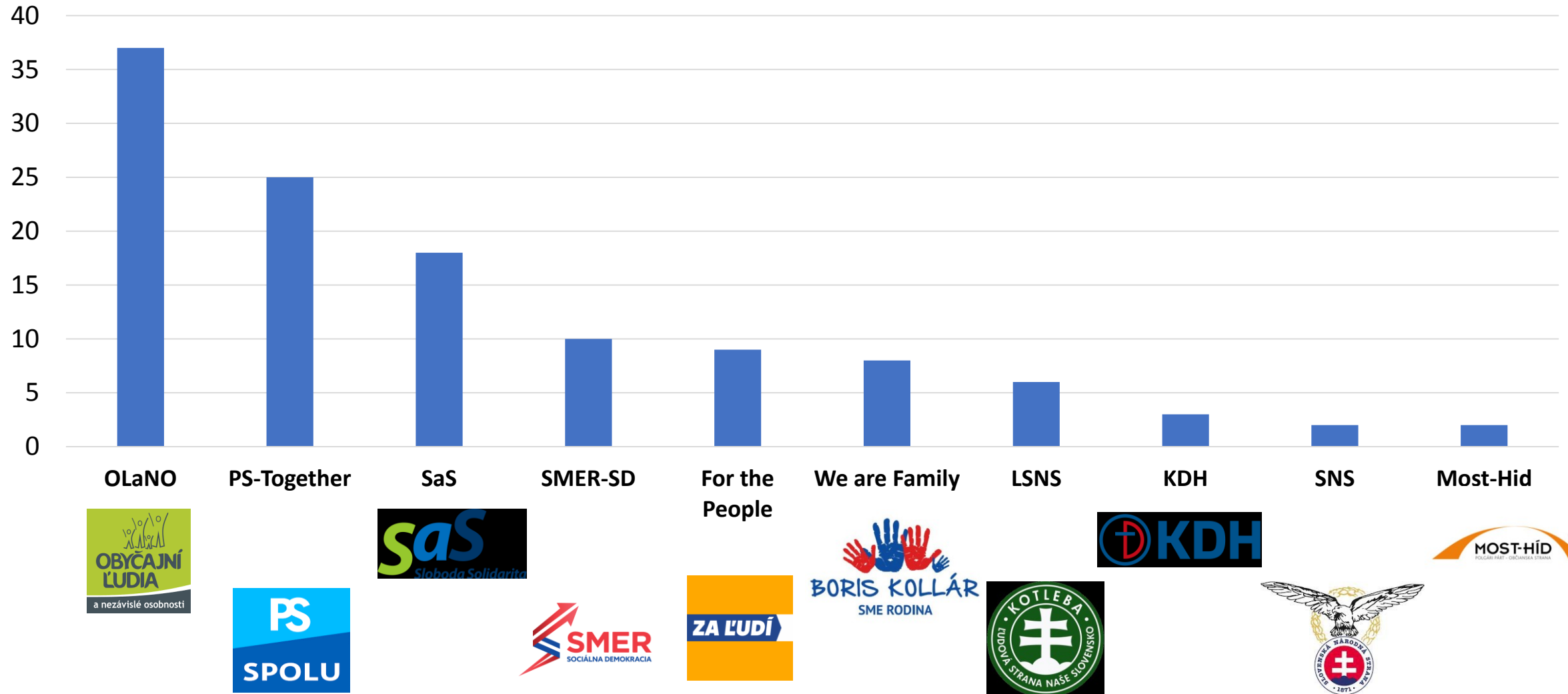
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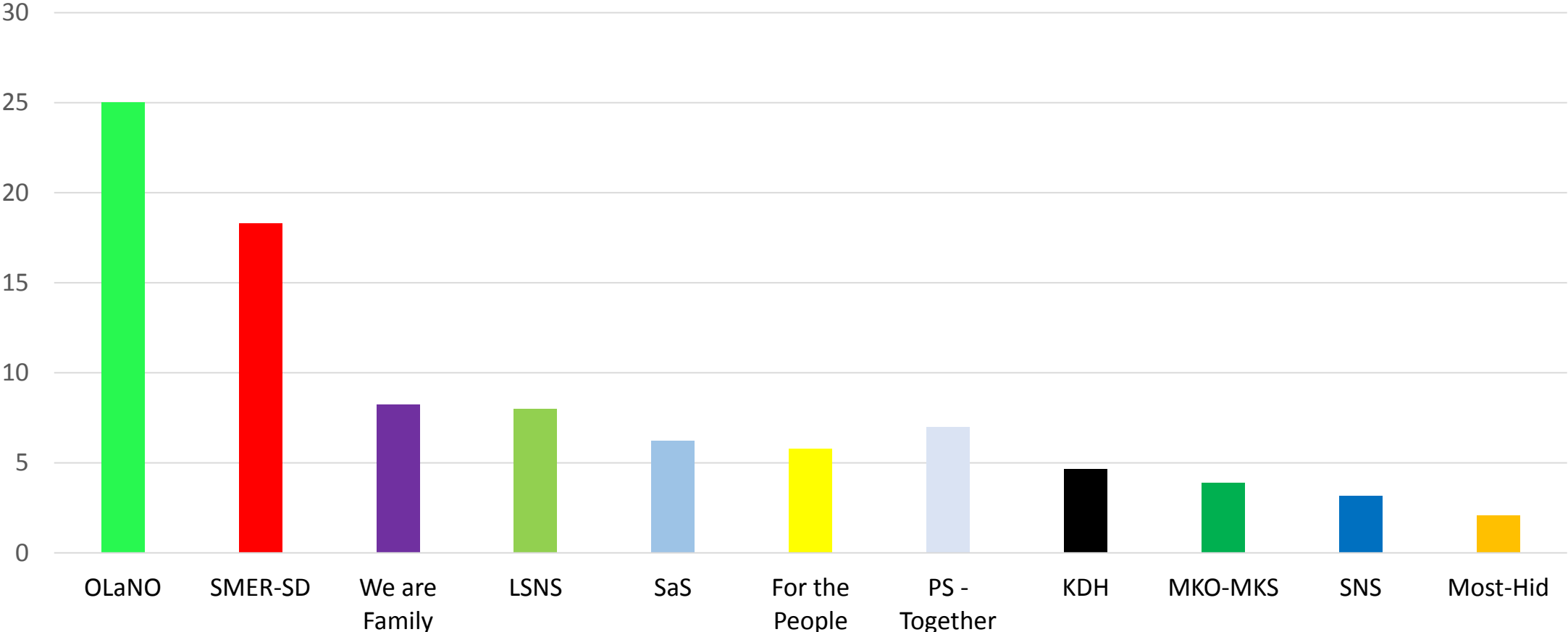
# Expert Evaluation of the Campaign (N = 56)



# Few Days Before the Election

- SMER and SNS announced vast social benefits before the election
  - 13<sup>th</sup> pension
  - Doubling of child allowances
  - Abolishment of highway tolls
- The parliament passed only the pensions
  - SMER-SD, SNS, LSNS, We are Family

# 2020 general election





# New Government

- OLaNO, We are Family, SaS, For the People
- PM Matovič
- 95 MPs (90 required to amend the Constitution)
- Question of stability and survival



# Potential clashes

- OLaNO:
  - Largest governing party, 53 MPs
  - Previous record of low stability
- Anti-corrupt voter's attitudes vs. Christian activists among MPs
- Conservatives vs. liberals in the government
- Two minor parties (For the People and SaS) weakened
  - Andrej Kiska retired from his party and politics



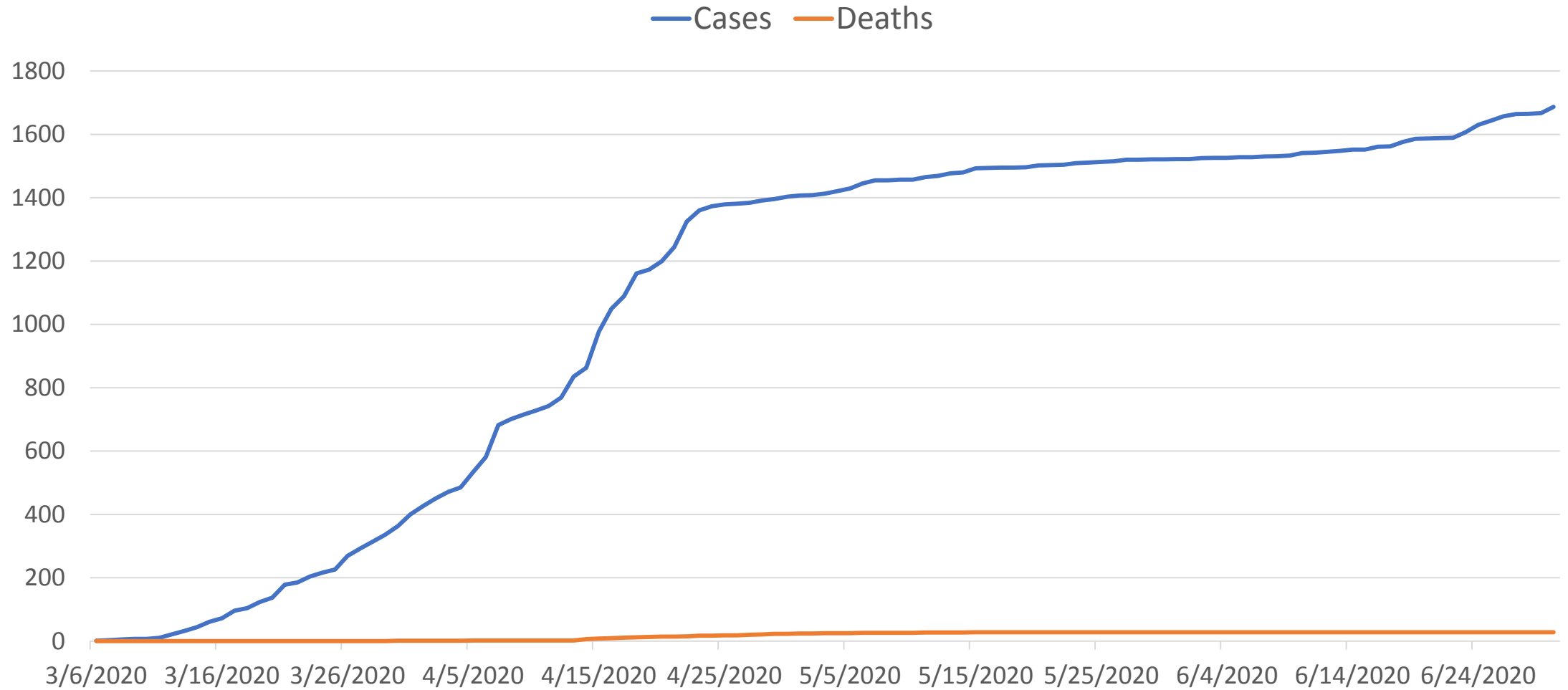
# Anti-corrupt activities

- “Mani pulite” in a Slovak way
- Numerous arrests of prominent figures
  - Judges, people in business, attorneys, police leadership
  - Many already confessed they had committed crimes
- Uncovering a huge corruption network allegedly linked to previous governing parties
- Unleashed fantasy of police name generators:
  - Storm, Tempest, Judas, Babylon, Purgatory, God Mills...

# COVID-19

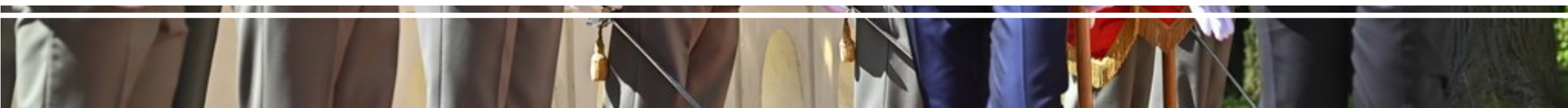
- Spread of pandemic during the first days of the new government
  - First positive test on March 6
- Quick response similarly to other European countries
  - Borders, lockdown, closure of schools, facemasks...
- Spring to summer 2020:
  - Great success in terms of numbers:
    - Low number of cases
    - Extremely low numbers of casualties
- Before summer – weakening of adopted anti-pandemic restrictions

# 1<sup>st</sup> Wave of COVID-19

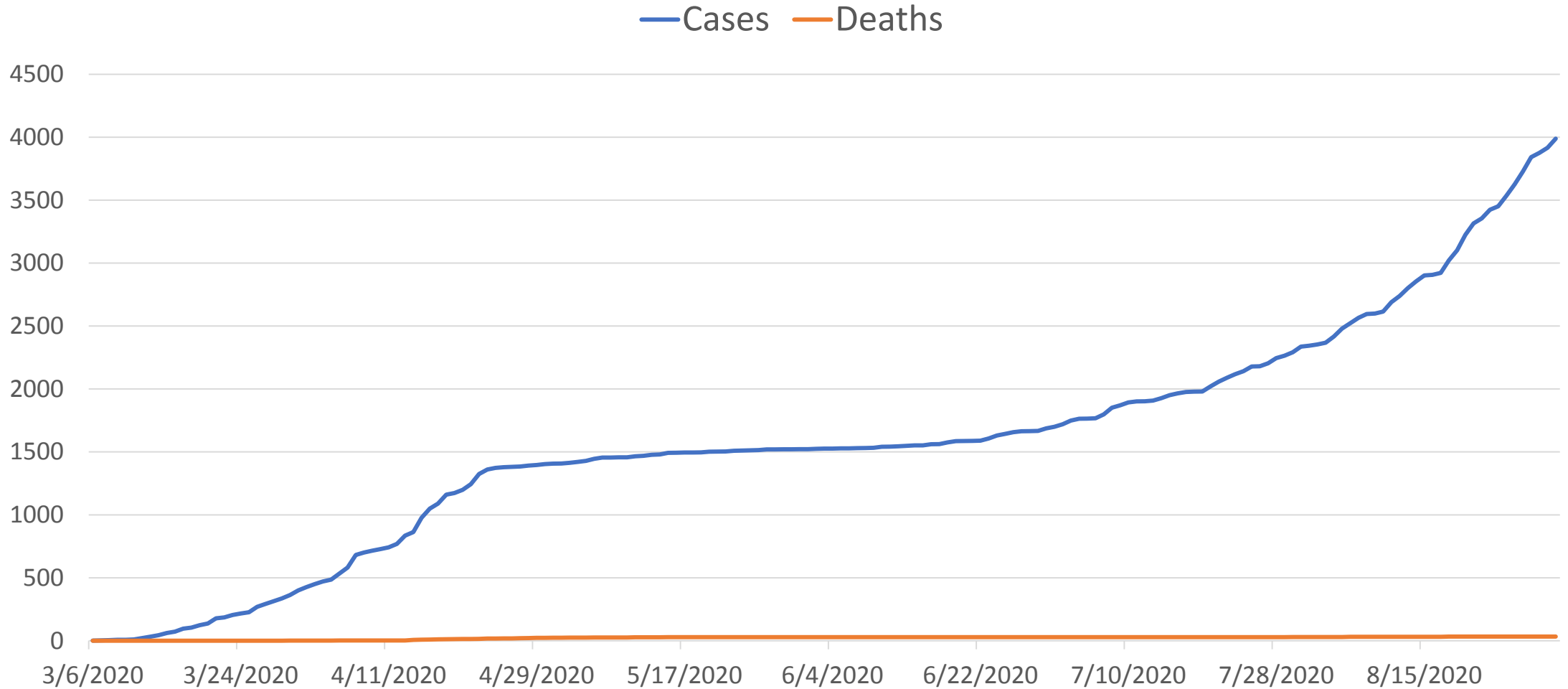




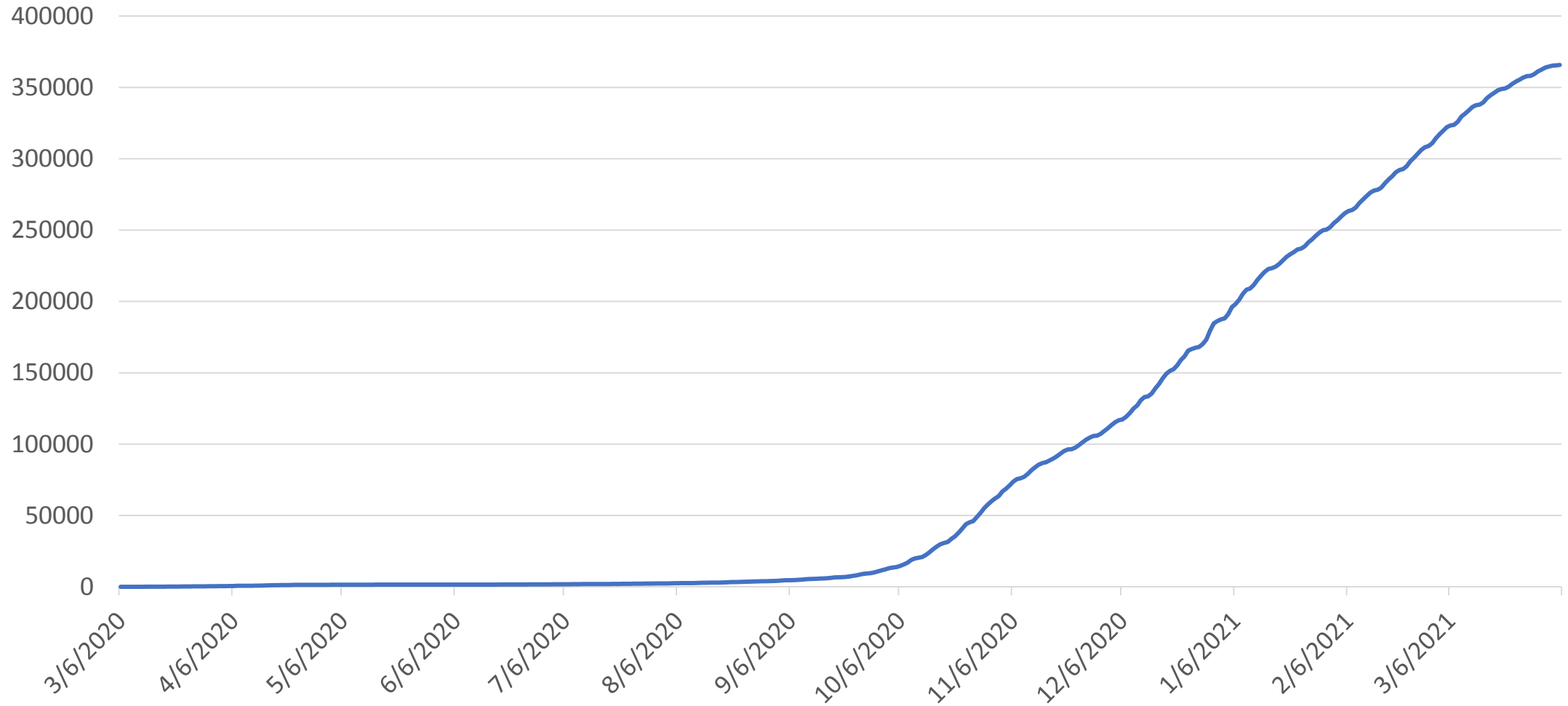
6 June 2020 – Borders re-opening



# 1<sup>st</sup> Wave of COVID-19 + Summer 2020

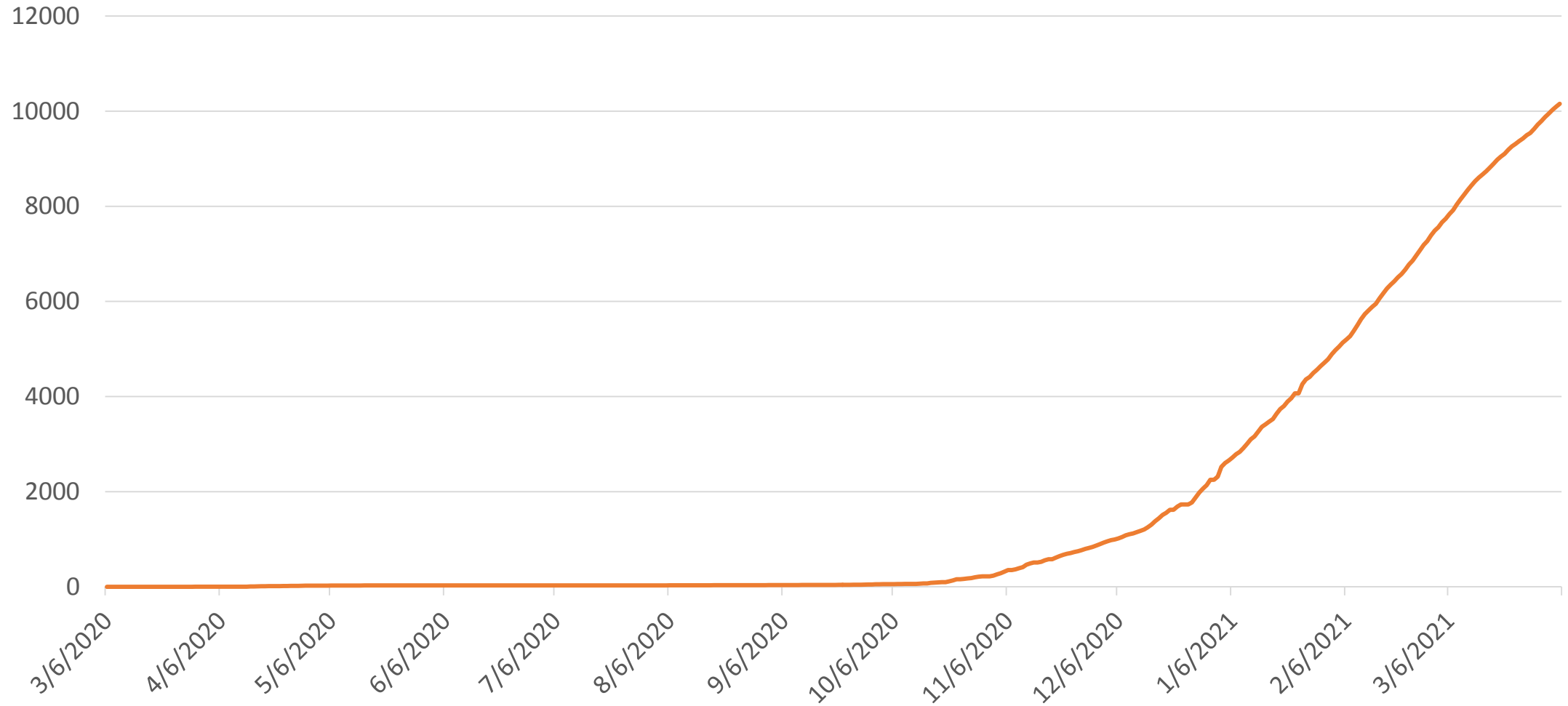


# 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave of COVID-19 – Cumulative Cases





# 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave of COVID-19 – Cumulative Deaths



# *Atomic Weapon* against COVID-19

- Nationwide testing
- Strongly supported by Prime Minister
- *'The pass to freedom'*
  
- Held on October 31 – November 1
  - More than 3.6 million people tested
  - One per cent positives
  
- Discrepancies over interpretation of its effects
- Further rounds of testing in selected regions



# Rising conflicts in the government

- Prime Minister Matovič v. SaS leader Sulík
- Topics:
  - Level of restrictions
  - Nationwide testing
  - Antigen tests purchase
- Constant tensions between OLaNO and SaS
- Enhanced by public opinion development



# Government Crisis in March 2021

- Escalation of previous development
  - Communication of PM – *Facebook politics*
  - Matovič v. Sulík
  - Atomic weapon v. reality
- 
- Purchase of unauthorized Sputnik V vaccine as the trigger



# Government Crisis in March 2021

- SaS and For the People demanded Matovič to resign
- Various firmness of such demands – SaS v. For the People
- A series of resignations of several members of the government
  - All ministers of SaS (including Sulík), one minister of For the People
  - One resignation from We are Family which remains a mystery
- Matovič facing risk of losing majority in parliament
- For the People facing risk of complete disintegration

# Government Crisis in March 2021

- Main scenarios:
  - SaS leaves the government (80)
  - SaS and For the People leave the government (70)
- ‘Reconstruction’ of the government:
  - Matovič ends as PM and switches office with Minister of Finance Heger
  - SaS and For the People ministers return back to their offices
  - The resignation of the minister of We are Family still remains a mystery
- Improving COVID-19 statistics as a factor?

# Dynamic Development in Opposition

- Voice – Social Democracy:
  - Splinter party from SMER-SD
  - Leader Peter Pellegrini
  - Initial support of 20-25 per cent of voters
  - Hidden strategy?
- SMER-SD:
  - Fico's unchallenged leadership
  - Sharp decline of support
  - New position of a small party



# Referendum 2021

- Referendum for early election
- Non-partisan initiative fully organized by political parties
  - SMER-SD, Voice, SNS
- Negative record of such referendums v. discontent in the society
  - COVID-19 restrictions, economic impact of the pandemic
  - Death of previous Police President
- In April 2021 SMER-SD announced it gathered enough signatures
- Constitutional Court declared early election referendum as violating the constitution → president refused to call the referendum
- Further attempt to have a referendum about having a referendum in 2023





# Russian Attack on Ukraine

# Reaction to War

- Support to Ukraine
  - Ammunition
  - Heavy weaponry
  - Humanitarian
- Refugees
- Initial silence of pro-Russian actors

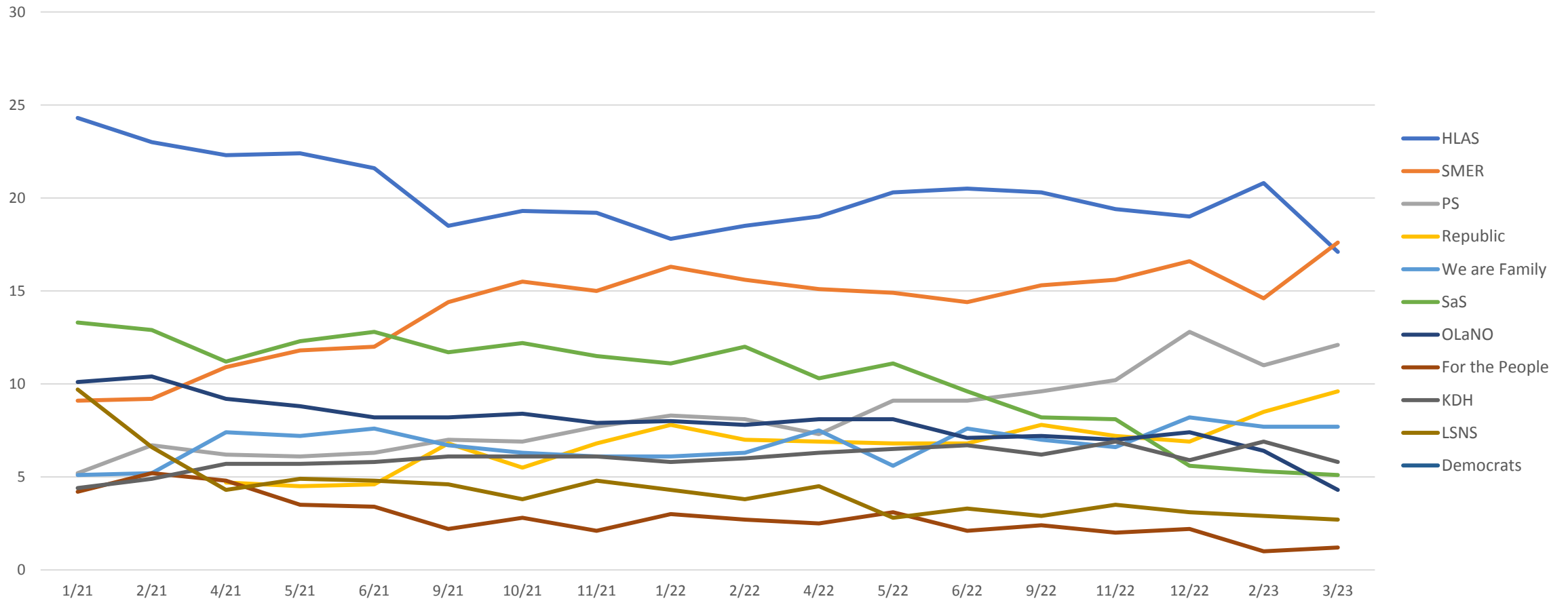
# Further Development

- Rising polarization of society
- Energy prices, general inflation
- Disinformation media
- Government vs. opposition
- Shift of Smer to extreme (pro-Russian) positions

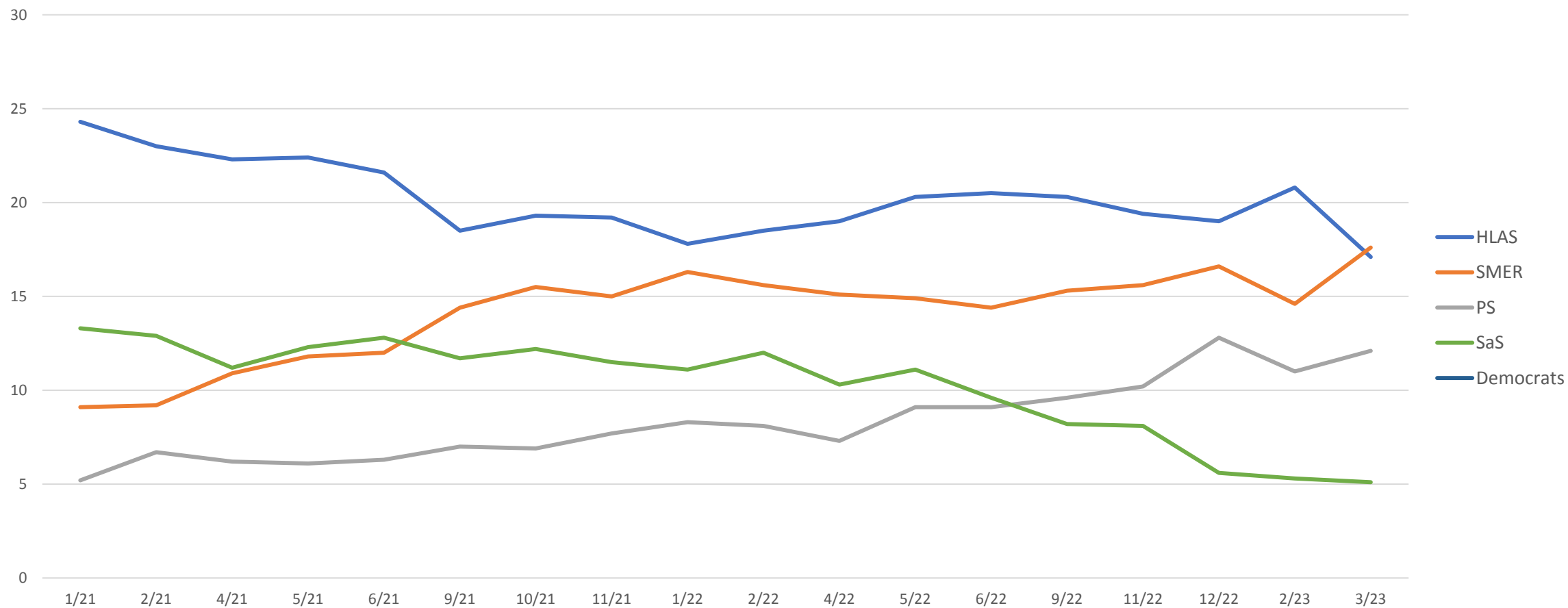
# Crisis of Government

- Summer 2022
  - Government (minus SaS) supports expenditures on families with support of far-right Mps
  - SaS suspends coalition agreement
  - Request for Matovič's resignation
- Minority government of Eduard Heger
  - December 2022 – vote of no confidence
  - Matovič resigns as Minister of Finance
- Agreement on early election in September 2023
- Democrats
  - Splinter party from OLaNO
  - PM Heger and OLaNO liberal wing

# Polls before 2023 Election



# Polls before 2023 Election



# Crossroads in 2023?

- Question of liberal democracy
- Resemblance to 1998 election
- SMER openly supports cooperation with far right Republic
- Integration process in centre-right parties
  - Democrats of Eduard Heger
  - Dzurinda 2.0?